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Is there an Ontological Musical Common Sense?

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The question of the role of our pre-theoretical or ordinary beliefs about music in musical ontology has already a history which, more or less officially, begins with the classical article of Levinson, *What a musical work is*, published in 1980. According to the interpretation formulated by Kania, in an article published in 2008, Levinson's work has produced a *methodological turnaround* in musical ontology (and more generally in ontology of art[1]) by setting out new ontological priorities[2]. Musical ontology, according to Levinson, should take into account some *entrenched beliefs* which characterize our way in considering works of music. This methodological point is introduced in order to defend the *creatability* of musical works and consequently to reject musical Platonism[3]. According to Levinson, an ontology (as the Platonic one) which *sacrifices* the creatability

[1] Already from the passage quoted in the next note, it is clear that all the considerations made by Levinson, even though originally formulated within the musicological context, can be easily applied to ontology of art in generally. This should be taken into account for the rest of the article, also because ontology of music is often developed within a more general frame of ontology of art.

[2] «Levinson's essay can be seen as the beginning of a concern with what exactly has priority when we examine the ontology of art: it is implicit in the structure of Levinson's argument that the demands of the art in which one is attempting to understand trump the demands of metaphysics [...]. One useful way of approaching these issues is through Peter Strawson's distinction between descriptive metaphysics [...] and revisionary metaphysics [...]. If the ontology of art is constrained by ordinary artistic practice, then ontologists of art are also (or should be) engaged in a more descriptive than revisionary project» (Kania [2008]: 427-429, 434).

[3] «But why should we insist that composers truly create their compositions? Why is this a reasonable requirement? [...] The main reason for holding to it is that it is one of the most firmly entrenched of our beliefs concerning art. There is probably no idea more central to thought about art than that it is an activity in which participants create things-these things being artworks» (Levinson [1980]: 8).

of musical works in order to gain in consistency and elegance somehow *loses its grip* on reality because *we all believe* that musical works are created. It can be possibly questioned whether Levinson was the first to consider ordinary beliefs about music (and about art in general) as a desideratum for any ontology of music. It is however certain that, after the publication of this article, this point has become unavoidable. Nowadays Levinson's methodological approach has assumed a dominant position, even among those authors who do not share Levinson's ontological views about musical works.

On the other side, and this is the point which should be investigated here, Levinson's desideratum has been most favorably, since its introduction, conjoined with a series of parallel thesis and tacit assumptions, which can be enumerated as follows:

(1) ordinary beliefs about art have often been identified as *commonsensical*;

(2) the opposition between an ontology which takes into consideration our ordinary beliefs about art and another one which doesn't assign any significance to them has been interpreted in the light of Strawson's classical opposition between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. That is why the expression *ontological descriptivism* became commonly used;

(3) the fact that an ontology of art cannot ignore our ordinary beliefs about art and artworks has been frequently identified with a so called *pragmatic constraint*.

Even if these three assumptions are strictly correlated, I intend in this article to tackle specifically the first point, which I believe to constitute a critical point in the whole development of musical ontologies of the last thirty years. The second and third points will be also sidewise tackled.

The identification of pre-theoretical beliefs about music (and about art more generally) with *commonsensical* beliefs has been *de facto* affirmed in several works of secondary literature; in some cases by differentiating revisionist and descriptive ontology of music[4], in other cases by opposing the obviousness of our common sense beliefs about works of

[4] «I briefly recall the methodological distinction done in the introduction: either is the issue of ontology of music addressed in a revisionist way or is this issue addressed in a descriptive way. In the first case, the ontological status of musical works is studied regardless of what we say and think usually of musical works. What drives the analysis is a general ontological question [...]. In the second case, it's about understanding the mode of existence of musical works by relying on implicit assumptions of practice, of thought and of popular musical discourse. The goal is then to best account for common sense intuitions about music, or again to resolve the contradictions of musical discourse and practice» (Darsel [2009]: 149-150).

art against the difficulty in establishing an ontology of them[5], and in some instances by labeling as *commonsensical* our ordinary belief that works of music and literature cannot be identified with their concrete realizations[6], while in some examples simply by claiming its existence[7]. In all these quoted references (and in many other instances) the assumption of the commonsensical nature of our ordinary beliefs about music (or art) seems to me always (explicitly or implicitly) assumed. The main point of this article is to put into question this assumption.

A preliminary remark to be made is that *common sense,* in the ontology of art (but possibly in the whole field of analytic philosophy) risks becoming a sort of *theoretical ghost: everyone talks about it, but no one knows what it is.* As a matter of fact, we see that arguments from commonsense have been used by different authors in order to justify different ontological paradigms. Zemach, for example, uses a commonsensical argument (someone not following his argument is meant to be *out of his mind*) in order to justify a nominalistic approach (even if different from Goodman's)[8]; Kivy, in his

[5] «Although the common sense understanding of works of art may be fairly obvious, determining the ontological status of works of art is extremely difficult, as is immediately evident from the extraordinary variety of answers among the major contenders. Indeed works of art (of some or all kinds) have been placed in just about every major ontological category—including those of mental entities, imaginary objects or activities, physical objects, and abstract kinds of various sorts» (Thomasson [2004]: 3).

[6] «Now I argue that there is an entrenched common-sense view that different concrete artifacts may be realizations of one and the same artifact-type and that artifact types are not identical to their concrete realizations. This might not apply to all artifacts, but it is true for many - at least, to name a few examples, for works of music and literature, for linguistic signs and complexes of linguistic signs and for many (if not all) objects of everyday culture» (Reicher [2013]: 228). The kind of authority that, according to Reicher, such (supposed) commonsensical beliefs should exercise over an ontology of art (and more generally over a philosophical system) is specified a few lines before: «I consider a reasonable principle in philosophy, not to throw overboard entrenched common-sense conceptions without good reasons [...]. Deviations from common sense are of course possible (and often also necessary), but they fundamentally need a justification» (Reicher [2013]: 228).

[7] «Whether we focus on dance, theater, film, literature, music, or the visual arts, we can formulate a common-sense view of what counts as a work in that art, what is involved in appreciation, and what constitutes artistic value, and can then find entities that pass as works in the late modernist tradition in that art, yet that seem to present problems for such a view» (Davies [2004]: 17).

[8] «If Jones tells me that he heard Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* last night, he would probably be very insulted if I responded, "You mean, of course, that you heard a *part* of the *Missa*-you could not have heard it all", he would rightly protest that he did hear the whole *Missa* indeed (i.e., he

important article *Platonism in music: Another kind of defense,* uses quite a convincing commonsensical argumentation[9] in order to *defend* musical Platonism, while, as we noted previously, Levinson uses commonsensical reasons in order to *attack* musical Platonism. All these authors, even if not mentioning the notion of common sense, use its *authority* in some ways in order to defend their arguments, which (according to them) should be accepted by any reasonable person, by anyone who does not intend to deny what does not need to be demonstrated. As a matter of fact, Zemach does not demonstrate that by listening to a performance of a musical work, one listens to the whole, and not to a part of it, while Kivy does not demonstrate that, if a musical work, after having been listened to for decades or centuries, is discovered to have been composed by another author, no change to its identity would occur. Levinson, on his part, does not prove that musical works are indeed created. All these statements, emanating from those authors, do not need to be demonstrated or verified because, so to speak, common sense is a *guarantee for them.* However, we can see now how the issue becomes problematic, considering that these three diverse texts make different, even opposite statements about musical works. If any ontology *borrows* from common sense only what is *convenient* for its own objectives, common sense risks becoming, by recalling Schelling's Absolute (in Hegel's words), a «night where all musical ontologies are true».

There are however much deeper reasons for questioning the assumption of the existence of musical common sense. The first point to be clarified is; what is meant by *common sense?* This notion has quite an important tradition, both in the continental (Vico, Reid, Oetinger) and in analytic philosophy (Peirce, Moore, Putnam). In spite (or possibly because) of that, there is not clear, accepted definition of common sense.

did not leave in the middle). If I insisted that in order to hear the whole *Missa* one has to hear all its occurrences, including its past and future ones, he would probably believe that I had gone completely out of my mind» (Zemach [1970]: 243).

[9] «There is a little prelude and chromatic fugue in E flat, long thought to be an early work of J.S. Bach, which we now know, through the discovery of the autograph, to be a mature work of Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703). Do we want to say that we have discovered it to be a different work? […] Our intuition here, I think, is firm. The pull of sound structure as a concrete identity criterion is too powerful for us to waver from it, far too paradoxical, at least for the musical mind, to think of disputes over authorship, or changes in attribution as questions about changes in the identity of the work where, that is to say, the cases are real ones, and not philosophers' nightmares» (Kivy [1993]: 63).

Nicholas Rescher, in his *Aquinas Lectures* of 2005, identifies three different notions of common sense:

(1) an *observational* common sense, which relates to the «collection and coordination of the deliverances of our external senses»;

2) a *judgmental* common sense, which regards «matters that are obvious and evident to anyone of sound understanding [*gesunder Menschenverstand*]»;

(3) a *consensual* common sense, identified (in my view mistakenly) by Rescher with the German notion of *Gemeinsinn*[10], which is a «matter of facts that "everyone knows" and with respect to which there is a universal (or near-universal) agreement of people's opinion».

Even if this is not the only available categorization (the one sketched by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, for example, is different[11]), there is an agreement about a first notion of common sense, rooted in the Aristotelian tradition and developed particularly in the Scholastics, which refers to the coordination of deliverances of external senses; this first notion plays no role in the considerations about common sense made in the context of contemporary ontology of art. On the contrary, the other two notions (in Rescher's categorization) both play an important role not only in the domain of ontology of art, but more generally in the analytic philosophical tradition, even if it is not always clear to which of the two notions one is referring to. The question is, as Rescher observes, that these two notions are quite connected: on one side, what is considered obvious, normally has a universal consensus; and on the other side, what has universal consensus, sooner or later, will be considered, somehow, obvious. It seems here that, rather than two different notions of common sense, we have two different *emphasis* of one single phenomenon, which can be understood in different ways. And the difference between the two approaches lie in the established causal relationship: the question is to understand whether a particular belief *enjoys consensus because it is obvious* (judgmental common sense), or on the contrary, whether *it is obvious because it enjoys consensus* (consensual common sense). And most probably, in more than one situation,

[10] In Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where can be found a quite important formulation of *Gemeinsinn* as differentiated from the *Gesunder Menschenverstand*, the notion of common sense is understood, in my view, in a different way from Rescher's consensual common sense. See in this sense the passage from Carl Dahlhaus quoted at the end of the article.

[11] See Gadamer (2004): 18-28.

it would be quite difficult to tell which of the two approaches is to be chosen in order to best interpret a commonsensical statement.

In the case of musical common sense, however, it seems that it is possible to draw a line, and to state that it pertains much more to the *consensual* rather than *judgmental* common sense. All the cases quoted above show arguments where the consensus played a major role. Commonsensical statements about music are commonly accepted beliefs. They do not have the obvious character of statements like "pigs don't fly". They cannot have it, because they're statements about cultural entities which, as cultural, cannot be *obvious* in the sense intended above. Still, they're commonly accepted, and this common acceptance is the reason why we should have very good reasons in order to reject them. The same definition of *ordinary* beliefs about music follows in the direction of *consensual* common sense. *So it seems we're on the safe side*. Musical common sense is a consensual common sense, according to which, works are composed (Levinson, Thomasson), the performance of a symphony is not a part of the symphony (Zemach), and a different attribution of a work of music does not change its identity (Kivy). This is *what it seems. What it is*, actually, is something different.

The problem is that consensus and ordinary acceptance are not *sufficient* conditions for common sense beliefs: they are *necessary* conditions, surely, but it's not enough to define a belief as commonsensical. The question posited by Rescher is the following. If common sense were only a question of universal consensus, we should admit that it evolves historically, as people in the past times thought "that the earth is flat, that the moon is made of green cheese, that storms at sea are manifestations of Neptune's wrath"[12] and so on. Today's ordinary beliefs are not at all the same as centuries ago. We can think simply about the Copernican revolution as an example of radical changing of a belief shared, mainly, by the whole of humanity. So, *were* common sense simply a question of consensus, even universal consensus, we should have to admit that it would evolve historically. But actually, and this is Rescher's point, common sense *it is not* simply a matter of consensus. All the commonsensical beliefs are widely accepted, but the opposite is not true. So we should try to «distinguish between *common* or *popular* beliefs in general and *common-sense* beliefs in specific»[13]. According to Rescher, common sense beliefs are characterized not only by the fact that they are popular, or even universal, but by the fact that they are popular *because they are obvious*.

[12] Rescher (2005): 37.
[13] Rescher (2005): 37.

Obviousness is one crucial feature of common sense[14]. Moreover, and this is a second crucial feature, this obviousness is not so much a pure *theoretical* obviousness, based on observation, but a *pragmatic* one; *common sense beliefs reflect the general practical experience of the human being in this world*[15]. That's why, in Rescher's view, a lot of popular beliefs are not strictly commonsensical. Believing in witches or dragons, and many of today's current superstitions, are not beliefs grounded in the daily human experience of the world, and thus have nothing to do with common sense[16]. But even scientific theories, or simple scientific statements (the earth is round), which nowadays can be considered as obvious, are not for this same reason commonsensical[17]. Of course they *can be* commonsensical, but neither because they are commonly accepted nor because they're obvious. This obviousness must be rooted in a common human experience of the world. In this sense, believing in the fact that the limit of speed is light-speed is not commonsensical, as we don't have any daily experience of it. In our daily human lives, we never try to go beyond light-speed (not to mention to achieve it).

[14] «Universality is not the crux of common sense as such. Rather, the pervasiveness at issue is a consequence of the obviousness that the definition of commonsensicalness requires. In sum, universality of acceptance is at once a *consequence of* and an *indicator of* the presence of that obviousness that demonstrates common-sense beliefs» (Rescher [2005]: 33). In this sense, Rescher explicitly adopts the *judgmental* version of common sense: «It is this sort of *judgmental* common sense, as explained above, that will lie at the center of the present deliberations» (Rescher [2005]: 19).

[15] «There is thus a big difference between merely *common* beliefs that are very widespread and perhaps even general and specifically *commonsensical* beliefs. This difference lies in the fact that commonsensical beliefs are determined as such not simply by the fact *that* they are widespread but rather by the explanatory rationale of *why* this is so, namely, because such beliefs are what they are on account of their role in a cognitive agent's *modus operandi* in satisfying human needs […]. It is this essentially pragmatic grounding what through facilitating the satisfaction of human needs serves to define commonsensical beliefs as such» (Rescher [2005]: 38-39).

[16] «It is certainly not the case that every widely or even generally held belief is a matter of common sense. Many people believe in astrology and many, perhaps even most, people believe in certain superstitions [...]. Such things are the very opposite of common sense because what is required for common sense is *grounding in a general principle that reflects* the general experience of mankind in meeting human needs [...]. And it is thus its *grounding in the general run of everyday experience* rather than a generality of endorsement that makes a generalization "only a matter of common sense"» (Rescher [2005]: 37-38).

[17] «The structure of the earth-as-a-whole, the material composition the moon, and the causative basis of sea-storms all represent issues that transcend the resources of common sense as we here understand it. None of these are matters which figure patently in the common experiences of great masses of people» (Rescher [2005]: 37).

Believing in the force of gravity it is much more commonsensical, as we have daily experiences with this law. *If you take a stone in your hand and you let it go, it will fall*. This belief can be called commonsensical, because it's always been part of the basic human experiences.

So common sense beliefs are *commonly* accepted because they derive from a *common* experience. According to Rescher, however, the common sense is not just a collection of practical advice, i.e. it is not only a question of pragmatics, but also and in the first instance of epistemology, as he states[18]. In other words, common sense beliefs constitute a sort of common image of the world, but *this common image is based on human practical experience*. Of course commonsensical beliefs can *also* include pragmatic rules, and can be related to the prudence, the *phronesis*. The crucial point, however, is that, according to Rescher's formulation of common sense (which I support), even the less practical common sense beliefs, including Moore's «whole long list of propositions, which may seem, at first sight, such obvious truisms as not to be worth stating», because they are «a set of propositions, every one of which (in my own opinion) I *know*, with certainty, to be true»[19], even such truisms must be rooted in our *daily commerce with the world* to be considered commonsensical. Everyone knows that stones fall on the floor if dropped, that stones don't fly, not because everyone has read Galileo's essays, but because everyone has had at least an experience of it in his life. And, to be honest, common sense would affirm that «the heavier the stone, the quicker the rate of falling», which is what Aristotle stated, and which is actually wrong, as Galileo subsequently discovered. But this is the experience we have (we never make experiences in absence of attritions, so the weight actually influences the falling speed), and common sense, in first instance, would affirm that. The commonsensical image *of the* world is shaped by our ordinary, daily basic experiences *in the* world.

This last point is critical, from different points of views. In the first instance, it seems to justify the identification between pre-theoretical (commonsensical) beliefs about music

[18] «But in the end, then, common-sense facts are not really a matter of biology (of hard-wired connections imprinted by biological evolution) or a matter of sociology (of the statistically shared connections of the social group). Rather, they are a matter of epistemology; of considerations so fundamental and evident that their acceptability-warrant is very bit as strong as anything that could possibly be adduced on their behalf» (Rescher [2005]: 39).

[19] Moore (1959): 32. The question whether also in Moore's case the commonsensical character of such truisms is grounded in a common human experience of the world cannot be answered in this place.

and a so called pragmatic constraint of musical ontology. *Were* our pre-theoretical beliefs about music commonsensical, then they should be rooted in our practical experience with music, and so finally with our musical practices. What is to be questioned, however, is whether the identification between pre-theoretical beliefs about music and a (supposed) musical common sense is legitimate. I don't think so.

As a matter of fact, Rescher's pragmatic formulation of common sense not only excludes from the commonsense beliefs about *extra-ordinary things*, which might at a particular moment gain even an universal and popular consensus, thereby becoming *ordinary beliefs* (for example the fact that light-speed is the speed-limit); the fact of being rooted in basic practical human experiences excludes from common sense also other beliefs which are culturally conditioned and therefore historically changing. Actually, were common sense assumptions culturally and historically conditioned, to claim its authority would, in the first and last instance, be a form of cultural or historical hegemony. So, by accepting Rescher's formulation of common sense, as a common image of the world, common not only because it is obvious and widely accepted, but because the underlying consensus and obviousness is grounded on a *common human experience of the world*, we accept also a sort of trans-historical and trans-cultural dimension of common sense which, on the other side, represents the authoritative moment of it. This latter point is, in my view, even more relevant in the case of an assumed authority of commonsensical beliefs about ontology, musical or not. Ontological definitions and statements should not be historically or culturally determined. Even when we affirm, for example, that artworks are *historical objects* (as Rohrbaugh does), or that they are *cultural emergent entities* (as Margolis does), *these definitions should not be themselves historical or culturally determined*. Ontology has the ambition of making assertions about *what there is*: it can state *the historicity and the cultural dependency of what there is*, but *its own statements cannot be historically or culturally dependent*. Of course, we could include ontological statements in the realm *of what there is*, so assuming a meta-ontological point of view we could claim that ontological statements are historically and culturally determined. But the *regressum ad infinitum* would be more than evident, meta-ontological statements could be also put into the realm of what there is, and be therefore considered as historically dependent. Finally, returning to our subject, a musical ontologist who states «Well, today musical works are platonic universals, tomorrow I don't really know, because ordinary beliefs about music could change in the next 24 hours», would not be taken seriously. But changing the number of 24 hours in 24 centuries, in this context, makes no substantial

difference. So if we give authority to our ordinary beliefs about music, it's because we implicitly admit that they're commonsensical, in the sense of Rescher, that they are not culturally or historically determined. And we have to add: *Were* ordinary beliefs (about music, or art) commonsensical in this way, the appellative of descriptive ontology would be fully justified, as Strawson's distinction is grounded on the admission of «a massive central core of human thinking which has no history», constituting the basis of descriptive metaphysics, opposed to revisionary metaphysics which, on the contrary, is historically changing[20].

The point to be made now is that, in my view, «a massive central core of human thinking related to musical ontology, which has no history», *does not exist*. The pre-theoretical thoughts about music therefore cannot neither be identified with musical descriptivism, nor (and maybe more important) with a supposed existing musical common sense. *The problem of musical common sense is that it does not exist, and even if it existed, it would have nothing to do with questions related to musical ontology*. This hypothesis could explain in the first instance why different philosophers used (more or less implicitly) common sense authority in order to justify opposite ontological paradigms. Already this detail should make us suspect that this musical common sense is perhaps not so safe and sure. Still I would like to voice my denial of the existence of musical common sense by three arguments which, I hope, will be convincing.

The first argument is related to the notion of *creation* which, according to Levinson (and many others after him) should be an undeniable aspect of our pre-theoretical beliefs about music. According to Levinson, none on this earth would ever cast into doubt that musical works have been created, more specifically created by the composers, and in this act of creation resides the same value of the composer and the respect that we normally attribute to him. For this same reason, Amie Thomasson can affirm that «Any view that identifies works of art (of any kind) with pure abstract structures immediately encounters other conflicts with the common sense conception of art»[21]. This statement is actually false, as long as we assume (contrary to what

[20] Strawson (1990): 10. See also Note 35.

[21] The whole passage shows how commonsensical beliefs and musical practices are often, if not identified, at least cast as an inseparable couple: «Any view that identifies works of art (of any kind) with pure abstract structures immediately encounters other conflicts with the common sense conception of art. For types and kinds, traditionally understood, exist eternally, independently from all human activities; thus, contra traditional beliefs and practices regarding

Thomasson does, as will be shown later) a notion of common sense in line with the one formulated by Rescher. It is correct to state that *nowadays* the idea of creation is central to the same notion of art. The same words *creative* and *creativity* are used in many contexts, maybe too many and too often, and these uses are all related, more or less explicitly, to the idea of the artistic endeavor, as *creatio ex nihilo*, in bringing into existence something that was not there before. All this is true. What is, on the contrary, quite doubtful, is to state that the notion of work of art as a product of human creation is commonsensical, i.e. that it has always been a central thought in the human history and across different cultures. This is not the case. I can put forward my argument against the commonsensical character of the concept of artistic creation in four sequential stages: (1) From a theoretical point of view, the concept of creation was totally absent from the philosophical panorama of ancient philosophy, including Plato and Aristotle, who in turn should not be considered as an insignificant part of the western philosophical tradition. As Höffe pointed out[22], among others, ancient thought did not contemplate the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*. On the contrary, the *Weltanschauung* of ancient Greece was philosophically dominated by two concepts of eternity, a Platonist one (the ideas are eternal as *extra-temporal*, *unchangeable* entities not submitted to the time, i.e. to the kingdom of changing things), and the Aristotelian one (the unmoved-mover is eternal as *sempiternal*, as source of the infinite time and infinite change[23]). In any case, the idea of creation is not at all *obvious* in ancient Greek thought. (2) As Jimenez pointed out, if on one side Christian theology has significantly contributed to the introduction of the concept of creation in western thought, this concept was for centuries the privilege of God. The human being was not at all meant to *create* things, as he was himself a *creature*, a created being. The idea of human creation began to be envisaged more clearly after the Renaissance, though mainly emanating from the artistic domain, where, together with the disappearing of the craft guilds, the transition from the *artisan* to the *artist* is in evidence; as a consequence, artworks become more and more directly connected to their authors (it is in in this period that artists began signing their works). In the philosophical domain however, it was Romanticism, through the notion of the *Genius*, which decisively affirmed the creative

the arts, works of art on such models cannot genuinely be created by artists at all, but only selected from the range of available types or kinds» (Thomasson [2004]: 10).

[22] See Höffe (2009): 90-91.

[23] See Michon (2004): 305-333.

power of the artist[24]. And actually it is probably this very romantic figure, which is, so to say, the *ancestor* of the currently and commonly accepted idea that works of art are creations of the author. The same status of art is in my view nowadays still heavily conditioned by this romantic heritage[25]. However, we're talking, in fact, of a concept which imposed itself most certainly only in the last two centuries. Before that time (evidently, as always in this case, such statements should not be taken too strictly, exceptions can be found in the different domains) the idea of the artist as a creator of works of art was not at all a central piece in the *conceptual repertory* of western culture. (3) In the Romantic Aesthetics, however, we can find also a strongly significant platonic element, according to which the artist is not actually creating, but only recognizing and reproducing platonic ideas. Both Schelling's and Schopenhauer's formulations of the activity of the Genius contain strong elements of Platonism, which are evidently in conflict with the concept of *human creation*. The artistic Genius, in Schelling's case, is a sort of "God's messenger", and only God, strictly speaking, should be considered *the immediate cause of all art* («Die unmittelbare Ursache aller Kunst»[26]); In the case of Schopenhauer, the Genius is a sort of *decoder of eternal ideas*, which are somehow hidden behind the changing multiplicity of the world as representation, and constitute the eternal metaphysical forms of the reality[27]. (4) This platonic element is still present also in the contemporary pre-theoretical thoughts about music and art in general, when we consider the concept of *inspiration*, which is possibly the most widely used word in our daily conversations about art. The difference between the artisan and the artist is that the artist should not only master the technique of production (composing or performing), but should also be *inspired*. *Only through inspiration it is claimed somehow that the creativity of the work is ensured*. But what is inspiration if not the idea of the human mind coming into contact with something coming from outside, *received*, much more than *created*, by the mind (or the spirit or the soul) of the composer? The common concept of inspiration is therefore also linked with the popular version of the romantic figure of the Genius, as the man who is capable to *get in touch with God*, to receive the ideas from God and pass them on to human kind.

[24] See Jimenez (1997): 34-36, 41-44.
[25] This point cannot be further developed here, as it would deserve.
[26] See Schelling (1856-1861): V, 386-387, 458-460.
[27] See Schopenhauer (1819): § 36.

Finally, already by limiting ourselves to the western civilization, which is in any case quite a remarkable restriction, the idea of artistic creation is a quite young one. It is less than a thousand years old and surely its acceptance into the repertory of popular beliefs about art is most probably even much younger. Moreover, the notion of inspiration, which is as much entrenched as that of creation, seems to suggest that the artist, rather than creating a work of art, is almost receiving his ideas from external sources, from God as it is believed to be in the most of cases. To state that the concept of creation is commonsensical therefore means not only to make out of a quite restricted (temporally and spatially) cultural paradigm the model of human common sense, but also to select from our popular beliefs about art and music only a part of them, while almost *ignoring* the other part. On the contrary, the very brief considerations made here should suggest that, even within western civilization, the ideas about the coming to existence of a work of art have changed dramatically, and in some cases they are not at all consistent (the concept of creation seems inconsistent with the one of inspiration). There are in my view enough supporting elements to assume that, should we look outside the western civilization, we could potentially find other different ideas about this subject. I feel therefore entitled to state the following: there is no commonsensical view about creatability of musical works. There are different historical moments and cultural traditions, in which some ideas about it have been predominant, and in some cases they have coexisted with opposite ideas.

The *second argument* I'm going to develop in order to refute the thesis of the existence of a musical common sense, and which therefore applies to the same notion of *musical descriptivism*, is related to the concept itself of musical work. Actually, any statement relating to the existence of a commonsensical view about *what* musical works *are* presupposes *de facto* that there is a commonsensical view about the concept of musical work. Even if the commonsensical view about musical works were that musical works do not exist, this negative statement would require the assumption of a common (sensical) understanding of the concept of musical work. This assumption, as it is well known, has been confuted by Lydia Goehr, who, in the chapter *Musical production without the Work-Concept* of her important work related to this subject, shows how the idea of the work of music as an achieved artifact, as a product of the activity of the

composer, a product, furthermore, whose *existence and essence* is independent from its performances, was not at all recognized before the 19th century[28].

However, the issue is even worse than that. The question is not only related to the music *before* the 19th century, but also to the music *after* the 19th century, and not pertaining to the Western cultivated music. As a matter of fact, the very concept of musical work is not at all a univocal one. Zofia Lissa shows, for example, how the apparently commonsensical idea that a musical work should have a beginning and an end is not at all an obvious one, if we widen our perspective to the extra-European music, or even aleatory contemporary music[29]. On the other side, popular music is often not written in musical text, and so we must allow for radical variations in different performances, which make it difficult to define the uniqueness of a specific musical work (besides often lacking authorial attribution) performed at different times[30]. At one moment, Zofia Lissa puts forward the radical (and rhetorical) question of whether the category of Work of Music (not to mention its ontological characteristics, such as creatability or repeatability) is valid for all music cultures and periods[31]. The answered response is the following:

> The category of musical work is a historical category [...]. This means that in certain periods of the development of musical culture the activity of man's sonic statements expresses itself in works, in others in sound structures with other ontological units; these entities pertain with no doubt to music, but not to the class of musical works. The music was different in different times and civilizations of the globe, and the thinking in terms of only a civilization and a historical time requires a fundamental revision. [32]

If Lissa (and Goehr too) is correct, it becomes difficult to talk about ontological musical common sense. If on one side common sense should constitute a series of human beliefs which are, substantially, independent from time and space, from geography and history, pertaining so to say to the human civilization as such, and if on the other side

[28] «The idea of a work of music existing as a fixed creation independently of its many possible performances had no regulative force in a practice that demanded adaptable and functional music, and which allowed an open interchange of musical material. […] Music was not always produced to outlast its performance or survive more than a few performances. And when it did survive many performances, numerous changes could and usually would be made to the music in the process» (Goehr [1992]: 185-186).
[29] See Lissa (1975): 175.
[30] See Lissa (1975): 12-13.
[31] See Lissa (1975): 11.
[32] Lissa (1975): 52-53.

the very basic concept of any musical ontology, namely the concept of musical work, varies from culture to culture, to tradition to tradition, and in some cases, according to Lissa's and Goehr's view, we can even talk of *musical practices without musical works*, we can then see that the existence of musical common sense, at least in relation to musical ontology, is actually only an illusion. More than that, it is not only an illusion, but a *culturally biased illusion*, making out of our cultural paradigm a rule valid for the whole human history, which is not only *inexact*, but also *unfair*. In the claim about the existence of commonsensical beliefs about what musical works are I see also what Lissa notices in a lot of philosophers (including her teacher Ingarden) of music, which mainly extrapolate from their culturally and socially limited perspective a sort of human rule, valid for all cultures and all times:

> The views about the essence of music are by all aestheticians historically limited, as they refer to a musical practice, i.e. to such a type of works, their performances and to such a kind of their reception, which is provided to philosophers by their age, their environment and the culture to which they belong. The fundamental error committed by different philosophers who formulate aesthetic theories, is in fact that they consider themselves as absolute representative of the entire species "man", and make their own way (among others psychologically, historically, socially determined) of assimilating art universally and objectively valid, from Pithecanthropus to Atomic Era.[33]

We can apply this passage to our case: *The fundamental mistake of philosophers claiming the existence of an ontological musical common sense is the one of making out of the popular musical beliefs about musical works, valid in a particular historical, cultural and social milieu, a sort of anthropological paradigm and consequently an ontological constraint*. Without the implicit assumption that our categories for thinking about music are valid for all the rest of humanity, the same word of *commonsensical* would lose its meaning and the authority given to these same beliefs would lose its ground.

As a matter of fact, the idea of a plurality of musical traditions, and so of different ordinary musical beliefs, is confirmed by a series of texts. I will take here the examples of two among the most significant ones, Andrew Kania and Amie Thomasson, and this will be my *third and last argument* against the same concept of ontological musical common sense (and consequently of ontological musical descriptivism).

[33] Lissa (1975): 173.

In his text about the methodology of musical ontology, Kania, as we saw in the second note, explicitly states the need, for an ontology, which aims to take into account musical practices, to be a descriptivist one. A few pages later, however, Kania affirms that descriptive musical ontologies are somehow *condemned to pluralism*, because different situations or different circumstances generate different beliefs about music:

> Although Strawson mentions that it is unlikely any metaphysician has been wholly descriptive or revisionary, it seems to me that we should think of theorists not as partly the one and partly the other, but as falling on a spectrum between two polar extremes. At the descriptive end of the spectrum is the particularist, who argues that there is no such thing as the ontological nature of the artwork, the musical work, the classical musical work for performance, or any kind of artwork. We must look at the particular details in any given case, describing each work as it is, rather than fitting them all, or any group of them, into a Procrustean ontological theory. For the extreme descriptivist, to describe the work as it is, is simply to report how people think of it.[34]

We can only mention here how far we are from Strawson's idea of descriptive metaphysics, which is exactly defined as a substantially stable, meta-historical (and meta-cultural) metaphysics, we could say an *anthropologically grounded metaphysics* of the «commonplaces of the least refined thinking», opposed to revisionary metaphysics, which, like Kuhn's Paradigms, change along the path of human history[35].

Amie Thomasson, in her article about the ontology of art, published in the *Blackwell Companion of Aesthetics*, expresses the radical thesis that ordinary beliefs about artworks, even when they're not explicitly formulating a musical ontology, «determine

[34] Kania (2008): 435.

[35] The key passage, that I quote in order to avoid misunderstandings about Strawson's idea of descriptive metaphysics, is the following: «It might be held that metaphysics was essentially an instrument of conceptual change, a means of furthering or registering new directions or styles of thought. Certainly concepts do change, and not only, though mainly, on the specialist periphery; and even specialist changes react on ordinary thinking. Certainly, too, metaphysics has been largely concerned with such changes, in both the suggested ways. But it would be a great blunder to think of metaphysics only in this historical style. For there is a massive central core of human thinking which has no history – or none recorded in histories of thought; there are categories and concepts which, in their most fundamental character, change not at all. Obviously there are not the specialties of the most refined thinking. They are the commonplaces of the least refined thinking; and are yet the indispensable core of the conceptual equipment of the most sophisticated human beings. It is with these interconnections, and the structure that they form, that a descriptive metaphysics will be primarily concerned» (Strawson [1990]: 10).

the ontological status of the works and kinds of works referred to»[36], and consequently, the only valuable criterion of success for musical ontologies is consistency with the ontology *presupposed by or formulated in* such beliefs[37]. In Thomasson's argument we should accept such beliefs not because they are commonsensical, but because we don't have any better criteria (e.g. causal theories of reference[38]). What remains, is that, on one side, Thomasson identifies such beliefs with a pre-supposed musical common sense (in note 36 she defines ordinary beliefs as *common sense view*). On the other side, she explicitly makes clear that such beliefs are strongly related to the different musical practices, and that often such practices somehow *presuppose* some ontological statements, which are therefore *tacitly assumed*. In another article, Thomasson states that different art traditions and practices use different terms for designating different entities in relation to the works of art:

An interesting consequence of the idea that "art" is not a category-specifying term is that there may in principle be more ontological kinds of art than are recognized by us as our familiar art kinds and named by our familiar art-kind terms, and the ontological kinds of works of art may vary from place to place. For if different cultures have different category-specifying art-kind terms, and different individuative and evaluative practices that go along with these, these may name different kinds of work of art. Similarly, the ontological kinds of art there are may vary over time, and ontologically

[36] «Of course this does not mean that artists, critics, or others responsible for establishing the reference of names of works of art and of general terms such as "painting", "symphony" or "novel" must have a fully developed theory of the ontological status of works of art in formal philosophical terms. Instead, it is enough that they have basic views about the relation between works of art and the relevant physical objects, copies and performances such as those described in the common sense view [...]. It seems entirely plausible, even requisite, that artists and others in the art world have (at some level) these kinds of beliefs; such beliefs also form the backbone of practices of selling, displaying, performing, and restoring works of art of various kinds» (Thomasson [2004]: 17).

[37] «Coherence with just these background practices and (tacit or explicit) beliefs is typically used in assessing various positions about the ontology of works of art [...]. If the above discussion is correct, this is entirely appropriate, for—provided one accepts that at least some names of works of art and terms for kinds of works of art refer—it is such beliefs and practices that determine the ontological status of the works and kinds of works referred to» (Thomasson [2004]: 17).

[38] «One cannot appeal to causal theories of reference to motivate the view that the common sense conceptions of artists, composers, critics, and audience regarding the ontological kinds of symphonies, paintings, or novels may all be radically mistaken, and that a theory in radical violation of those assumptions may be true» (Thomasson [2004]: 16).

new forms of art may be introduced, e.g., various forms of internet art may differ in ontological status from works of such familiar kinds as paintings and movies.[39]

Both Thomasson's and Kania's considerations arrive in sum to the same conclusion: ordinary beliefs about music are conditioned by space and time, by geography and history, because they change according to the different musical (or artistic) traditions. Both of them do not make the mistake of unilateralism: they don't extrapolate from a particular musical tradition and culture the paradigm of the whole of humanity. On the contrary, we can see particularly in the quoted passage of Thomasson, how the pluralism of traditions, and consequently of individuative and evaluative practices about works of art, is explicitly stated and assumed. The criticism of Zofia Lissa therefore does not apply to these two cases. What remains, however, is that, on the one hand, the supposed commonsensical character of such ordinary beliefs (and consequently Kania's definition of ontologies taking into account such beliefs as *descriptivist ontologies*) becomes more than doubtful. On the other hand, Thomasson's position *de facto* reduces the ontology of art to an epistemology of art, and we have to add, to a *culturally dependent* epistemology. The result of such an approach is that, an object (an artwork) can pertain to two different and incompatible ontological categories at the same time, as different cultural traditions can have different beliefs and individuative practices about it. Finally, in my view, the authority given to ordinary beliefs loses a lot of force from the moment that we admit the cultural and historical dependence of such beliefs.

The three arguments developed here seem to me, finally, to show how the assumption of an ontological musical common sense is more than doubtful: as a matter of fact, this is my thesis, *there is no ontological musical common sense, because there is not a single music tradition, but a plurality of musical cultures, traditions and practices, within which different beliefs about music accordingly develop*. The same concept of *musical descriptivism* seems therefore inapplicable, for Strawson's concept of descriptivism, as we have seen, entails the assumption of commonsensical beliefs which do not change across history and cultures.

We should add a last consideration. The concept of ontological musical common sense is, in our view, even more problematic than the achievement of a unique concept of music which, as Dahlhaus has already stressed in an important passage, should be possibly thought, in a Kantian way, as a regulative principle:

[39] Thomasson (2006): 251.

The driving motive, that stood behind the idea "one" music [...] was the classic humanitarian utopia that in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* founded a Aesthetics, in which the judgment of taste is "subjective" and yet "universal", and indeed insofar as the Subjective tend to a "sensus communis", to a "common sense". But if humanity finds its expression in the principle of respect of an irremovable otherness, instead of in the discovery of a common substance, one remains faithful to the idea of "one" music true precisely by abandoning the concept of substance in order to restitute her as a regulative principle of mutual understanding.[40]

If the concept of "one" musical «*sensus communis*» is already problematic, the idea of an «*ontological* musical common sense» should be considered untenable. As Lissa and Goehr demonstrated, the same concept of musical work, which is *de facto* the backbone of any musical ontology (even a nihilist one) is far from being commonly understood in the different musical traditions. Some traditions do not simply need such a concept, because in their musical practices the achievement of musical activity is not a univocally identifiable entity, Platonic or Aristotelian it could be. So even a regulative role of the concept of *musical work* (and consequently the regulative role of the idea of an «ontological musical common sense ») seems to me, from the beginning, excluded. Possibly one day we will be able to define both a minimal basic concept of music and of musical common sense. But surely, these minimal concepts won't include neither the notion of musical work, nor the notion of creatability or many other notions pertaining to the musical ontology (such as musical structure, means of production, aesthetical properties). In the effort of common understanding among different musical practices and traditions, an understanding which should drive us towards a common concept of music, we should start from the acceptance of the fact that these same musical traditions and practices don't share a common ontology.

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